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Matsui Statement on Corps of Engineers Vegetation on Levees Policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-05) issued the following statement in response to the U.S. Corps of Engineers' release of a new Policy Guidance Letter for vegetation on levees:

"While I continue to review the details, I am very concerned that this is more of the same from the Corps on this issue. Their policy ignores the science on the subject, and does not provide the kind of flexibility that takes into account California's, and specifically Sacramento's, unique challenges.

"The Sacramento region faces a constant need to improve the levees that hold back the Sacramento and American Rivers, as well as numerous creeks and streams. We are ground zero for any policy changes coming out of Washington, and have seen the negative effects of the current policy in the dramatic cost increase of the Natomas Levee Improvement Project.

"For decades, the Corps allowed vegetation on many levees in California because science shows vegetation can actually strengthen levees. This practice is in stark conflict with the current Vegetation Policy. In a time of declining federal, state and local resources, I believe that public funds should be spent first on crucial levee fixes, rather than on the removal of remaining vegetation from California's riparian environment without site-specific, science-based evaluation.

"I will continue to reiterate Sacramento's unique situation to the Corps. I invite those at both the

Corps Headquarters and Division to, once again, return to Sacramento and see first-hand the challenges we face, and the critical need for a flexible variance policy. I will keep working with the Corps during this comment period in the hope that any final policy will be one that is flexible and provides assurances to the Sacramento area.”

Congresswoman Matsui has been a vocal opponent of the blanket policy prohibiting vegetation on levees for years. In February 2011, Matsui [sent a letter](#) to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, Jo-Ellen Darcy, with 16 of her colleagues urging the Corps to change their policy regarding vegetation on levees, highlighting that even the variance process is cost-prohibitive for the majority of state and local agencies. Matsui also [sent a letter in December 2010](#), which requested that the Corps reconsider their levee vegetation policy for both economic and environmental reasons. Congresswoman Matsui has pledged her commitment to continue to urge the Corps to restore balance to decisions involving levees and trees, and end the uncertainty that has plagued the Corps and their state and local partners over the last year.

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